

Derek Van der Syde – Part Two

This is Dr Sue Onslow, continuing talking to Mr Derek Van der Syde in Bournemouth, now on 9th July 2009. Derek, thank you very much indeed for making the time again to see me. I wonder please, could you begin again by describing how you came to go to Mozambique in 1967?

Thank you, Sue. 1967 was a pivotal year for me because my wife and I got married in September and a few weeks later, the Foreign Affairs ministry sent us both to Mozambique. Myself as consul under the Consul General who was also Foreign Affairs and we had just a short time in which to learn the rudiments of Portuguese sufficiently to pick it up again when we got there. So we arrived in late 1967 and we spent the next two and a half years in Mozambique in, then Lourenço Marques, and now Maputo. We were working with the Portuguese and getting all the sort of work which missions have to do, such as making good contacts with mayors and people of importance who could help us in our own interests. Also as a consul, I had to deal with the legal side including passports, getting people out of prison and visiting them in hospitals and these sorts of things which consuls always have to do. We used the Roman –Dutch law which was similar to the British and Commonwealth legal system.

(00:01:48) So repatriating stranded Rhodesians who'd got themselves in trouble?

Exactly, yes. I had close contact with our Immigration authorities for the issue of a temporary travel document. We issued vouchers for return by rail.

Mozambique used to be quite a tourist destination, quite a holiday area for Rhodesians.

Very much, yes, they used to make their way every Easter and then later in the year, straight across to Beira. Beira simply means “the beach” in Portuguese and they call it ‘Byra’ but it’s really ‘Bear-a’ and that’s straight down the south eastern road through Mutare, used to be Umtali and through the hills into the rest of Mozambique and so as far as the coast.

But what was your other work? You said that you were liaising with politicians in Lourenço Marques. Were you also liaising with the Portuguese military and Portuguese intelligence?

No, because we had an attaché, a military attaché, who was very important, perhaps even more than we were because it was a time when nationalism began to rear itself a little bit and he was always in touch with the Portuguese military and also the secret police who were called the PIDE. It’s rather an odd sort of name to give to the secret police but there you are.

So your work was mostly trade related if you weren’t doing your...

A lot of trade relations. There was an annual fair at which the Rhodesian tobacco and other products were shown. The Consul General was there every day and my wife and I used to have to go early, set things up and get things ready for...especially if the Mayor came along. Once in a while, Jack Mussett who was the Minister of Trade at that time, from Rhodesia came along especially to see how it was.

How far were you liaising with Rhodesians firms to evade international sanctions?

Not at all, at that stage. They weren't imposed until later on, so it didn't really impinge on our work. We didn't have to do anything clandestine, if you like, in order to advance the country's welfare.

I thought sanctions were imposed in 1968 and if you arrived there late in '67, surely that would have been one of your most important responsibilities?

Well, we didn't have very much to do with the actual workings of the sanctions. Both my wife and I were actively developing close relations, through hosting social occasions, lunches and coffee breaks in town, where Portuguese officials habitually relaxed and could discuss more freely than in an office. I reported to the Consul General anything of note from these or regular media sources, and also shared with the two attaches, commercial and military, whilst they did the same. The Head of Mission sent weekly despatches, including any from the Vice Consul in Beira.

The trade situation helped us a lot because the Portuguese and ourselves had a similar sort of interest, a mutual interest which was to try and maintain the situation as we knew it. Mozambique is about 2000 miles long, very, very difficult to run, especially from the southern end which was where the seat of government (00:05:16) was. The people in the northern area were, I think, it was the Makonde Plateau, where in origin, probably, some of the offshoots of the Zulu tribes. They felt very much under estimated (under-valued?) and with not very much development going on up there and this gave them a bit of unrest. But that wasn't the principal reason for the eventual outbreak of civil unrest.

So your responsibilities while you were in Mozambique: were they at all reporting or providing political analysis on the insurgency and how Portugal was dealing with it, for your home government?

Yes, but it wasn't through ourselves. It was through the military attaché, he probably was in touch with the CIO. There was a special sanctions breaking unit that travelled, and answered directly to the PM. I would prefer not to give any names, but this may help to clarify why myself as Consul and probably the Consul-General were not informed for security reasons regarding the sanctions. I would comment only that the measures taken were highly successful, proof of which was in the time elapsing before Henry Kissinger made his historic call on John Vorster in South Africa and by threats and

inducements, caused the flow of oil from SASOL (the oil producing plant in South Africa) to be cut off. I believe that later Kissinger felt that Smith had been correct in his assessment of more advancement for Africans, though not in the way he went about it. Remember also that the USA was acutely aware of the danger of communist growing influence with the African leaders.

Who was the military attaché, do you remember?

I'm just trying to remember. It was an ex-BSAP officer called Ted Oppenheimer who then later on retired to South Africa with his wife.

Where did you regard as “home” at this time? Did you still have an emotional tie to England with your brother still being there? Or since your mother had come out to Rhodesia, did you feel by this point that Rhodesia was “home”?

I felt Rhodesia was home.

So you no longer felt British? You felt Rhodesian?

Yes

And your wife, Lisa, she's French.

Yes

Did she feel herself to be Rhodesian?

I don't know if she felt that. The country was so different but she had been in Rhodesia for a little while before I met her and her friends up until then had been local people. She worked in the textile industry, in the administration so I presume that she did feel that she was getting to be at home with Rhodesia. So perhaps from that point of view, being in Mozambique, she would feel that home was in Harare or Salisbury.

Did you go straight from Mozambique to Gabon or did you have some home leave?

No, we went straight to Gabon and the people in Mozambique who knew us thought we had done something very undiplomatic.

Oh, this was a punishment posting?

(00:08:01) No. (The real reason for the transfer was because my colleague in Libreville was a diabetic and fell ill. He died a few months later, and his wife now lives in Barbados. She used to be a British Foreign Officer. The other reason was that we were both fluent in French.) Well, they didn't know where we were going because it was secret but the fact that we were recalled so quickly rather put this finger on us of having done something fraudulent. Of course, in fact there had been one attaché who was up at Beira. Beira had a

vice consul, a Rhodesian vice consul and he got recalled he got mixed up in the motor trade I think.

Oh really? Used cars, oh dear.

Yes, so he was recalled for some kind of misdemeanour.

Dodgy activity!

Oh yes, extra activity, yes

So you were sent to Libreville? You were sent to Gabon direct from Lourenço Marques?

Yes we were. We couldn't even tell our own parents where we were going and whereas my mother didn't seem to mind particularly, it didn't seem important to her, Lisa's mother and her family were very upset. They wondered why she couldn't say anything and they'd keep it quiet.

So when were you allowed to tell them where you were?

Well, not at all

So you just disappeared as far as they were concerned?

Yes

For two years?

More or less. Well, for a bit longer. I think eventually they might have gathered that we were somewhere still in Africa but it wasn't until we came back from there that we were able to say where we'd been. They just didn't want any kind of connection with Foreign Affairs, that was the whole point. So we were on our own in Gabon. You may want to ask more about Mozambique first?

Well, what should I ask about Mozambique? How big was the office there in Mozambique?

There were four people there. There was the Consul General, that was a Mr Van der Spey, a South African, an ex-magistrate, very, very nice person, Roy Van der Spey and his wife. There was myself, the consul and my wife. There was the commercial attaché and his wife and he was from Durham and finally there was Mr and Mrs Oppenheimer who were on the military and the police side.

So how much contact did you have with the British mission while you were there?

(00:10:38) None at all actually, we were...

You didn't bump into each other at diplomatic functions and things like that?

Only when we were first presented. We had to wear the diplomatic wear and tails and things and came before the Governor, who was a Colonel if I remember rightly. But apart from that, no, they must have known who we were, especially as our stand at the fair was a particularly large and lavish one. It was one of the more important ones I suppose because of our big thrust into the trade side.

So who were the big wheeler-dealers then in the Portuguese community in Lourenço Marques when you were there? I've read the book by Jorge Jardim.

The big wheeler dealers in Lorencos Marques were the South Africans, whereas in Gabon, on the foreign representative side, they were the French Ambassador, French Military Intelligence, and the Deuxieme Bureau (French Secret Service). The American CIA were also active, but the head got expelled for trying to ask me a lot of questions. There were however always CIA agents under cover away from the nominal head, as they were in Salisbury, and probably still are. However that is pure conjecture on my part. The British MI6 man did try to turn me in Salisbury shortly after UDI, but our Foreign Affairs were duly informed, which lessened his scope.

Yes, what was your view of Jorge Jardim?

He was a very shadowy figure. Jardim was mostly up in the Beira sector and he was a businessman who had first of all mounted a big tobacco factory just outside, and a school. He was doing a lot of community work for the local people, mainly for the African people in that area and he had connections with the main fuel providers. This was a key factor in the fact that the government of Rhodesia was able to carry on as long as it did.

He was a key link person for the government of Rhodesia then?

Yes, I would say so, a very important person.

When you went to Gabon, did you have the equivalent of Jorge Jardim there?

No but we had somebody better, we had Omar Bongo.

Ah, the President

Yes

You didn't have to present your diplomatic credentials or anything to him though?

Oh no, he wouldn't have been very happy if we had. He just knew through the French connection who we were and who would come in and of course he met the Minister of Foreign Affairs and got on very well with Pete Van der Byl who was a very gregarious person, very able to get on with all kinds and types, the highest to the lowest.

(00:13:28) Where was your office in Libreville? How close was it to French military intelligence?

Oh we didn't have an office.

So you just did it out of your house?

Yes, well we were always at the airport. You could say perhaps the airport tarmac was our office! But we had our own...at first we were in a little house left by our predecessors and the poor chap who got diabetes and died of it, and (his wife) came back quickly which was the reason for our sudden departure from Mozambique. We were next to the minister of the interior and had quite an adventure with his children because when he and his wife were away, the children used to play their hi-fi at full blast all round the neighbourhood. They also had a little pond with a nursing crocodile in it and we had about a dozen small crocodiles in our garden. We had to try and chivvy them to get them back out again.

Interesting pets from next door!

So having been at Gros Bouquet (which was less salubrious than the name would suggest), we asked if we could move nearer to the airport and we ended up in a very good block of flats on the main airport road, close to the Intercontinental Hotel where most of the crew eventually ended up when they had a break before they came back or went off.

Where was Jack Mallock's office in Libreville, and who ran it?

Well he didn't really have an office. His manager Jean-Louis was...

Jean-Louis Domange, you mean?

Yes, Jean-Louis (Domange. We met his Gabonese girl friend once, which showed his confidence in us, mainly because we befriended him and treated him with dignity. Otherwise he was a loner). I think he must have had an office in the airport building somewhere. In fact I seem to remember that was the case and this was how they kept in touch.

Did you know Jean-Louis' background?

Yes I did. I got friendly with him. He was very, very reticent of course but he had right to be because if he went back to France, he would have been arrested.

Why?

Because he'd done some offence or other in France.

Oh right, ok

(00:15:52) And he was of course a mercenary. He also held up a pilot at gunpoint to make him take Colonel Denard to our hospital in Salisbury. I was actually in the hospital staff at that time.

He'd been in the Congo, hadn't he?

Yes he had

That's how he knew Jack Mallock

Yes

Did Jack Mallock use then, these connections from the Congo in establishing Affretair?

It's very possible because he had a big experience...He was also mixed up in the Biafra campaign in which he was arrested and put in prison.

But that was during your time there, wasn't it? Or was it just before?

It was before we got there, we must have got there a little after. But when he was released, he owed his life to his Togolese Lawyer and he was very thankful for that. Poor old Zoe was always wondering what was going to happen to her husband.

Well, he does seem to have been a pretty colourful character, I have to say!

Every day he said the gaoler used to come to him with a broad grin and say "oh you're going to have your head cut off today, ha-ha". But he didn't in the end.

Well, I think he was a man who liked to live dangerously.

Did you know that he jumped out of his plane over Italy and broke both his ankles?

No I didn't.

He was operating with Ian Smith actually over Italy in fighter Spitfire type...and he was hit I suppose, by anti-aircraft fire or something like that. As he went down, bailed out, his parachute was a bit on fire and it didn't work properly but he landed in a snow drift from about 2000 feet, broke both ankles

and the partisan sort of fished him out and looked after him. This is the sort of chap he was.

It sounds as if he used up one of his nine lives with that one?

Oh yes, definitely

(00:17:56) Were you involved in the banking facility side of what was going through Libreville at all, or were you really a customs facilitator?

Only to the extent that if there had been some hold-up, bearing in mind, as I say, that the customs people were all of a different tribe or group and didn't particularly support the president. So if there was any trouble there, the only thing we could do was to report it back to the French military. We didn't interfere ourselves. We wanted to keep right out of the way of the customs and immigration as far as we could and allay any problems we had with our own crews going a little bit astray.

I just wondered, with the Rhodesian goods that were being brought in and sold in Gabon such as milk, such as the textiles you made reference to, such as beef. I mean, the earnings would have been kept off shore.

Well, they would have been in American dollars as far as I can recall. At one time I came as interpreter with Jack Howman - he had succeeded Pete Van der Byl as Minister of Foreign Affairs, he was an ex-home affairs man and was very versed in all sorts of local lore. A very nice pleasant person, not at all outgoing like Van der Byl. He came to see Bongo when he was first there. Bongo was sitting on a couch and beside him was a great pile of notes, it must have been about ten thousand or more, so he must have got straight out of the bank because they had the little paper wrapping round them; and he was just sort of talking away. I don't know if he was counting his money, what he was doing, a very relaxed sort of chap, very smiley and pleasant. Howman was sort of fascinated by this I think and they got on very well together.

I'm just wondering about Rhodesians' earnings in Gabon. Where did they stay? Did they stay in Gabonese banks or was the foreign exchange sent to Swiss banks?

I don't know myself but I should think that they would have been in some place with a facility. It could have been in the Gabonese bank because the bank relied on the CFA franc and it was paid to there so the French kept it protected and they could have shifted it through to Paris very easily because there was this office in Paris.

Did you know Max Dumas well?

Yes I used to go around to see him after he returned to Salisbury.

So was he French or was he a Rhodesian?

No, he was neither. Well, he was French but he was from Mauritius. (He was a UK and Colonies citizen by birth, as was my wife.)

Yes, so when had Max been recruited by PK van der Byl?

I don't know when but he was obviously from there and he was also a bit boastful but that didn't matter much.

(00:21:18) In what way?

Well, he seemed to be full of things that he'd done. He'd married a South African wife and she was very uneasy about everything but they had a daughter who became a teacher in Portuguese and Spanish, very clever girl and an elder daughter, who I don't know what she was doing. So we knew them on that sort of friendly basis as well, when they were in Marlborough which is a suburb of Salisbury. At this distance I would reassess Max as being more flamboyant than boastful. He must have been considered of value to have been so long in Paris, and a focal point for the visit by Piet van der Byl and others. A friend of mine, now living in this country, was posted to Paris also, but I don't think to replace Max, but more as an unofficial Rhodesian rep. with the Quai D'Orsay.

Do you know what his responsibilities were in Paris?

Well yes, it was simply to liaise with whomever it was he had to deal with.

Like whom?

Well I should imagine it would be with the, perhaps with the secret service. He never spoke much about what he did but he spent 12 years there but I imagine that mainly his contact would have been on the trade commercial side because otherwise, there wouldn't have been any point in having one who was simply trying to keep lanes open through...because the French, who were like that, they were very sort of...not very bothered too much about bending rules when they feel like it.

So was Gabon the major transit point for Rhodesian goods coming out of Salisbury, or were there other important transit points going to Europe?

Well of course, they'd use Mozambique as well until the British Navy caught on and blockaded Beira very successfully. They didn't have patrols down at Lourenco Marques because that's much further away. Apart from anything else, I think they were a bit stretched but that did mean that otherwise, goods were going through Durban of course. That was another major outlet, through Durban by railway. It was very easy, straight through. From Salisbury, stops were made at times at Luanda, on the Angolan coast, and Amsterdam. These may have indicated business dealings.

So I'm presuming then, the Rhodesians had yet another representative down in Durban?

They always had somebody down at Pretoria.

Jack Hawkins

Yes, Jack Hawkins and quite a number...well they also had the ex-minister for local affairs, John Gaunt. He was originally from the Gaunt family, John Gaunt of Scotland I suppose. And Harry Reedman of course, so they did have people who were very much switched on commercially and who knew the ways of government and I've no doubt that the customs people used to...probably visited Durban whenever there was a block or difficulty over papers because they had to be very careful about the origin of waybills and things like this.

(00:24:22) Yes indeed. So when you went to Lisbon for a year, your responsibilities again were trade?

Mine were not. They were political. My designation was First Secretary Political, and I was also responsible for the Chancellery, ie the local staff, interpreters, typists, etc. Col. Knox was not very friendly at first. I think he mistrusted Foreign Affairs staff, because of their mixed personnel, which indicated to him and certain senior Homer Affairs members, too liberal a tendency. However, I got on well with him and his rather aloof wife, perhaps because of my service background. I know that my predecessor was very unhappy with the Colonel who was a political appointee.

Then you were a political analyst?

Yes

Right

I read the newspapers, I used to report to the mission head who was Colonel Knox, an Australian and he was also the chairman of the Rhodesian Front.

Was he really?

Yes he was, yes. He was a great pal of Ian Smith's as you can imagine. That's probably why Ian Smith sent him there. He wasn't a diplomat, anything but. He was very much of a military man.

How did the war seem to you, from Lisbon, sitting in Lisbon, looking at Southern Africa? It would have given you a very different vantage point?

Yes it did because amongst other things, the British approached us and tried to seduce us into leaving things while "the going was good", as they put it.

So you were approached by ‘a gentleman in a tie’, were you?

The head of the mission in Lisbon, yes. He invited my mother who was with us because she was by herself and Lisa and myself over to their house. We saw a film of the Royal family and it really moved me because I was so fond of Elizabeth. I used to see Anne and...oh, this is another tale but I used to see Anne and Charles fighting over a tricycle in their back yard. My office in Hobart Place was overlooking Buckingham Palace. I had previously come across Elizabeth on an air/sea exercise in Malta around 1950, when she visited our squadron. A second instance occurred in Salisbury. Elizabeth held open house in the Rhodesian Museum, and as the Alliance Francaise used the film facility there, and I happened to be the President, my wife and I were invited in, though we did not meet her on the occasion.

So you could see royal squabbles and spats?

Oh yes, Anne used to throw fits of temper when naughty Charles pinched the tricycle and try to go off with it, still, I’m sorry, that’s an aside. So coming back to...

But anyway, the British Ambassador, in Lisbon then tried to turn you?

Yes he did and we just sort of thanked him very politely for his kind invitation and so on.

Did he try it with anybody else in the Rhodesian Mission?

(00:26:46) Well, he probably would have done. I imagine that he would be...I don’t think he would have tried it with Colonel Knox because he was not a very sympathetic character and especially Australian, he wouldn’t feel the same way. But perhaps we were the only ones because we’d been there for secretary political and also the jobs, I’d have to see to the nuts and bolts and the running of the staff at Lisbon so those two jobs were pretty well known to the British.

Did he also try to send any particular message to Ian Smith via you? I’m just wondering, in addition to trying to, shall we say, ‘welcome you back to the fold as a prodigal son’, a prodigal Rhodesian son...

Yes very much like that. No, I had no such message, He was just doing his job.

Was there any attempt also to use the Lisbon office as a back channel of contact with Ian Smith?

It’s an interesting point. He wouldn’t have asked through the head because there would have been just a sort of very abrupt “no”. But he could have done it using an unofficial approach such as intelligence channels. This is pure speculation.

I'm just wondering if you recall any such tentative approach?

No, the second IC was a long term Rhodesian Government Officer who'd been up in the deputy secretary and the agriculture and he and his wife were very, very different persons. He was really more of a Foreign Affairs man than Colonel Knox was, but I don't think he either would have succumbed to any kind of feedback. What he probably would have done would have been to report back to Foreign Affairs that such an attempt had been made. I must say, I didn't, I can't remember now whether I told anybody what happened to us when we were invited over.

But '74/'75, you were in Lisbon, that was when John Vorster down in South Africa was trying his détente and trying, with Kenneth Kaunda to press Ian Smith into accommodation with Joshua Nkomo. Did you have any thoughts on that from far-away Lisbon?

I actually didn't know about it. It could have been that there was some report on it to the head of mission which he would have kept to himself possibly, although it was very much a political matter or he might have discussed it with his second IC but I didn't actually know that Vorster was doing that. All I did know was when Henry Kissinger came along and leaned on Vorster and I don't know what carrot he offered, probably great investment of some kind. I know what the stick was but not the carrot.

For Kissinger with Vorster, it was the diplomatic recognition (in 1976). It was American support over the South African answer for political transition in South West African Namibia.

Gosh

(00:29:53) **Yes, that was quite a carrot**

That was a very big carrot

That was a very big carrot for the South Africans

A huge carrot and of course, Vorster wasn't there to try and work his way into handing over at that time. He had to wait for, who was it? De Klerk to do it

Yes

Yes, he was a more liberal person than the southern mould of Edgar Whitehead.

How did you find going back to Rhodesia after really quite a adventurous time? In Mozambique, in Gabon, in Lisbon, how was it going back?

Not good at all because by that time, I was so fond of the Portuguese that I could have lived there very happily and as a Portuguese virtually and they

were so very kind to us. Even when they said “sorry”, all this sort of thing, we said “that’s alright, we won’t hold it against you personally, that’s the way things are, that’s a realistic prediction”.

When were you sent back? In mid '75

Yes, in about mid '75. I completed roughly a year I suppose. I also had three months off with hepatitis. I was in bed for three months and I was treated by a Doctor who himself had had hepatitis and knew all about it because it was fairly rife in Lisbon at that time. I probably picked it up in the first time we arrived when we stayed in a hotel before we found somewhere to go and it's a four star hotel and I think that I must have got it when somebody didn't wash his hands in the kitchen.

Probably

But I felt pretty awful and when I started picking up again, I just set myself to learning more Portuguese.

When you were in Lisbon, just before you left, that was the time when the new Portuguese Government was saying that Angola and Mozambique could go for independence. Were you reporting on this?

Yes because, you see, the two counter coups fed by Spínola, we were there at the time. There was a little bit of bombing of the airfield just a little while and then the Air Force you see were very much pro-Spínola. Not so much the Army, the Army in the first place were these young officers in Mozambique and the reason for the unrest was partly because they kind of wanted to go on (00:32:29) strike. They hadn't gone back for ages, they'd been forgotten, their pay was poor and there was no prospect of promotion.

From your stand point in Lisbon, could you see what Mozambique independence under FRELIMO would do to the guerrilla insurgency for Rhodesia?

Well yes indeed, it was very plain and when Angola went as well, and I know how it went, it was – Neto was the intended chief but due to Rosa Coutinho and a few other...the Red Admirals they were called, it went to the other people instead and certainly not Dr Savimbi.

So how long did it take you to settle back in Salisbury? Did you feel very different from your former white Rhodesian friends?

Yes I did. First of all, I could see my career coming to an end.

Why?

Well because there was nobody left and there was no chance of promotion and I was getting...you know, if you start in government service, you get passed over by younger people. In the end, you don't come back, there's no

way you can. So I did speak to Stan O'Donnell who came over from social services. He was the head of social services to become Foreign Secretary so he didn't know much about foreign affairs at all. I spoke to him and said that this is how I believe things...and did he think that it would be a good idea to look around and he said "yes". So I did and I got into wildlife management and its resources.

But white Rhodesian society, white Rhodesian friends, how did it all seem to you on your return?

Well, I think at that time we felt very uneasy about things. This was of course another three years before the finale but we did feel that things weren't going at all well. We were losing support from our two main supporters, Portugal and South Africa.

I was just wondering whether you and your wife Lise felt very different? That you had changed because of your experiences and outside of Rhodesia and whether it caused you to look at Rhodesia with different eyes?

I think probably it did. I can't swear to it at this time because we're talking about over thirty years ago but I would judge by my own knowledge of myself that we probably had seen things in a different way and perhaps got a bit closer to the opposite point of view. We'd always been hoping that the black people would one day be at least...in the same status as the white people. I never felt otherwise than that. I felt they deserved it and a lot of them were very knowledgeable and extremely capable. So I think that was always in my mind, but it was probably more so after I'd been abroad.

(00:36:07) Did you have your strong faith then or did that come later?

Well, I had strong faith, but it was a little bit hidden. I think that we did go to the mass in Mozambique. In fact, we attended Salazar's funeral mass there with 2000 people in the cathedral it was and then De Silva came over for it as well. He was the next highest in seniority in the government.

For the remainder of your time in what remained Rhodesia between '76 and early 1980, you talked of being involved in wildlife management and you did your bit with "bright lighting". But what was your view of the internal settlement? The negotiations with Bishop Abel Muzorewa?

Oh, there was a lot of hope from them and we did feel that they were at the beginning. We're so used to going back to square one that every time there was an attempt at a negotiation, something broke down and it was time after time and minister after minister would come out or send other envoys and it broke down but this time. It did seem that at last there was a shift. Effectively the ten months of Zimbabwe/Rhodesia was a very interesting point. We got through so much work, all the white ministers and the black ministers got on extremely well with one another and they really did share. It wasn't the case I thought that maybe a lot of the white ministers would keep them and their own

little secrets to themselves so as to hold the whip-hand, so to speak. But it didn't appear to be like that; they were really ready so it seems as though they themselves had also changed to a large extent.

Even home affairs? Even Internal Affairs?

Oh, Home Affairs still managed to have a black minister but I think it would have taken a lot longer because it was very much Native Commissioner type of people who were in it and they were very solidly right-wing, the senior ones.

So was there the same doubling up of civil servants, of senior civil servants?

Yes there had to be. I don't know if it was complete because there were something like 45 permanent secretaries but I think they did have deputies who were black so this was one of the things that showed that Muzorewa was really, after all, very successful.

What was your personal view of his political and leadership qualities?

Oh, it was that he wasn't cut out to be a politician at all. He was much more like a church leader which he was of course originally, Bishop.

How about Reverend Sithole?

Well Sithole was different again. A bit of a crook, but very capable.

(00:39:32) In what way? Surely, I mean, he was a veteran African Nationalist leader...?

Well yes, he did get up to one or two things I believe. But having said that, I think he was one of the movers. He really could get things done, you could really deal with him, Sithole and a few others. I also found the same with Richard Hove. Richard Hove was in Mugabe's government and became a sort of vague commissioner in the Prime Minister's office. He had chaired the legal committee, cabinet committee which I was the secretary for a number of years on the thorny question of whether the civil service should become politicised or not. This was an absolute key thing and in the end, he reported to the Cabinet office that in his view it should remain outside politics but I think this was his downfall.

How politicised do you think then, in your experience, was the civil service during UDI?

Oh, they weren't politicised. They were strictly following the government in power. Whoever would have been in power, they would have said "that's it, we're there to be civil servants". In other words, they were very much like the British civil service which would do the same thing whichever government was in and the head of the civil service was the public service chairman, Malcolm Thompson. That's a similar name I think to the BBC director

general, I'm not sure. And he was so well thought of that Mugabe kept him on in that same place as the head of the civil service until such time as his head of cabinet, Doctor Utete from the university came and took over as he became then the head of the civil service.

What was your view of the Chiefs Ndeweni and Chirau?

Oh Chief Chirau was the traditional chief. He came from the Lomagundi District – to the west of Harare, I'm just trying to think of the province where he came from. Not so far from Kutama Mission where Mugabe had had his upbringing and into the church, that was the thing. Lomagundi was the province, Chief Chirau was from the Lomagundi Province and he was a typical chief but he was also the chairman of the Mashonaland Chiefs and so as such, he was looked upon as the sort of father of the whole lot. A rather stately, slow thinking man, very pleasant indeed and steeped in the tradition of the Mashona people.

How about Chief Ndeweni?

He was from the other side, the Matabele. He was in the similar position, the president of the council of chiefs. A very astute person, very quick thinking and decisive. Totally committed to his own black people principally but also he would look after the others and I think as such, he would have made the much better president than the one we've got.

James Chikerema, what of him?

(00:43:51) Yes, Chikerema had a very long life in politics. He was very respected by all the Shona people of course and he was also very well liked up in Zambia because he often went there. I think that he, again, was a moderate, very moderate.

As the war intensified in the late seventies, particularly from '76 onwards to '79, do you think it's fair to characterise it as a civil war?

Yes, yes I think so. The Bantu peoples had come down from the north and occupied the region, having ousted the indigenous Bushmen, and giving rise to the Monomatapa Empire, with trade links to Arab countries and what appeared to be a stable government. Today the remnants of the royal Rozwi still have privileges recognised by the Mashona, in choosing chiefs. Then came the invading Zulus, fleeing from the wrath of the Paramount Chief Dingaani. These warriors settled in the west, at Gubulawayo, 'the place of blood, or of killing' in their language, under Mzilikatsi. Rhodes followed and treated with Lobangula, who, for a gift of rifles, and probably other inducements, allowed Rhodes the mineral rights. Then came the white settlers in 1890, and after the two world wars, there were influxes of immigrants from many European countries, lured by the prospects of gold, farm land and a healthy climate.

Land hunger was the basis of the appeal for the guerrilla leaders, and since the whites now felt that they were also indigenous, the resulting conflict was between two groups who believed strongly in their own rights to the land and its benefits. Much of the opposing Rhodesian armed forces contained African troops, and in Foreign Affairs, my own friends did not resign in protest against the Rhodesian Front.

It's true that a lot of the villagers, the mujibas, they were the young people who carried the stuff around and spied on the troops, were coerced into it and most of them were just peaceful cheerful people. They didn't want to be mixed up; they were caught in between so many times they were massacred by the other side because the poor things were in the middle. But I think by and large they did approve of what the guerrillas were trying to do. They couldn't have done anything else, they were black people for black people.

Were atrocities by the white led security forces reported? Or was this just part of – you knew, or one knew, a little bit of what was going on?

I think they were probably reported to the CIO chief. He would have to know about them because he might have to take some sort of damage control and he might even advise the generals that they should at all costs avoid this so as not to get the blacks much more solidly behind the guerrillas.

But were you aware of such tales, such rumours, if it wasn't in the open public domain?

There was only one where there was really difficulty about it.

When was that?

This was the one at Musame Mission. At least six priests were killed by men in uniform, and officially the guerrillas were blamed. However, in 1994, when a small group of us established the AIDS Orphanage outside Mutoko Village, on the opposite side of the Mutemwa Leprosy settlement, the then Warden there became a good friend of ours. His name was Father John Dove, SJ, and he was convinced that the killing had been carried out by a group of Selous Scouts, who operated often behind the lines, under Col. Reid-Daly, and who made the event appear to have been carried out by the other side. One priest survived by feigning death. The truth may come out one day, but it illustrates the brutality of a war that should have been avoided, in my opinion. If there had been a greater willingness to advance the quality of life of the African, it would have been more difficult for Mugabe to have taken over from the moderates, because his movement would not have been backed up by the rural population. However, with the help of logistics from China, and his own ambition, he probably would have gained power in the end.

Yes

Musame Mission is still a raw sort of scar on the face of the war. The other one of course which was a very bad one on the other side, the ZIPRA forces

shot down Viscount with a whole family of Indians, Patels aboard, amongst others, and they survived the crash and they were shot by the people and the whole reason was they thought General Walls was on board.

Well, they shot down two Viscounts. There were two...

Yes they did, there was another one shot down somewhere else and the only reason I can think of is why they were all shot was that when the guerrillas realised that their main target wasn't there. They must have shot them to avoid witnesses. I can't think of any other reason.

Well, it sends a powerful political message.

(00:47:04) These people were quite innocent civilians and probably with their families, I think it was an awful shame. The Dean of the Anglican Cathedral actually recorded a disc called "The Thundering Silence" I think it was. I had a copy of it at one time but I got rid of it very quickly because I thought if ever our house was searched, they would find it and it wouldn't be a good thing.

Why not?

Well, because that would have been a part of an anti-black attitude.

I see, so after independence...

Whether I was or not, it would be sufficient.

Do you think it was in any way a racial war? Or do you think that depended on the person doing the fighting?

Well, it would have to be fundamentally. It was a war because the whites and their families were afraid of being overwhelmed by the blacks. You know, there were originally about maybe 20 blacks to one but it became pretty obvious in the end there were maybe about 200 thousand or 250 thousand whites to millions of blacks who flourished under the white rule. It must be said, although they didn't have the best of everything but some of the businessmen did well. But the sheer weight of numbers there, it was usually, the whole effort was through fear.

Well, but an explanation offered to me is that of the security forces, the majority were in fact black. They were black Rhodesians in the Rhodesian African Rifles, within the BSAP, the technicians.

They could well have been and because they wanted the situation to stay as it was because they did have peace and they had the chance of working because work was available to them and I think the main thing was though, they were anti-Mugabe.

So they were politicised to a certain degree?

I think they probably were, yes.

So there's an element of a tribal war there too?

Oh there's always an element of tribal in these things, yes.

So plain ideology...

Yes and I mentioned...did I mention to you the totem system?

No, what of it?

(00:49:52) Well, it's quite important. The tribal groups have totems, some are Rhinoceros, some are Tsuru, the hare who's supposed to be a very clever fellow, he outwits everything.

And the cockerel

The cockerel, yes. The cockerel belonged to Mugabe's family and so was chosen to represent the party he founded. If you're of that totem, it's not a totem like the totem poles of the Red Indian Tribe at all, but it's a totem nevertheless. It seems to be all wrapped up with ancestor worship and the Shona culture and the Shona religion. Because the Shonas have a very, well, I think, rather a high type of religion in themselves. They believed in ancestor worship but it was always a benevolent one, if the grandfathers died, they were supposed to be looking after the village. All the background on that was given in the Doctor Gelfand books, if you can get hold of one or two of them. Gelfand was a medical specialist in the Salisbury group of Hospitals when I was there in 1959. He used to travel around the Mashona land villages gaining information for his books, and no doubt practising at the same time. He was much respected by all races.

When it came to Lancaster House, what was your view of it? Were you aware? You were no longer involved in foreign affairs at that point?

No, I'd gone back into the Cabinet by then I think.

So you had something of an interesting view then?

Yes, we had a certain amount of feedback but at the time, they preferred to carry on until an announcement could be made, keeping just Ian Smith of course involved, informed and Ken Flower and people like that and all we could hear of was that negotiations were going along and that we would be informed later. This indicates that some hard bargaining was taking place.

So there wasn't a free flow of information from London back to Salisbury?

Well if there was, I wasn't part of it.

Did you try to follow it closely, what was going on?

As far as we could, yes and we just hoped that things would work out because for some reason or other, Lord Carrington had a rather bad name amongst the Rhodesians. I think that that was a bit of prejudice. Maybe also, he did a good job for the British government in promoting, making it possible for the two sides to get together. It's unfortunate that Nkomo wasn't the final important person.

Did you hope or did you expect him to win? What was your sense?

No, I didn't, I expected Mugabe to win because we were mainly in the Mashonaland area and we were much more au fait with that side of it than we were with the ZIPRA forces on the western side of Zimbabwe. And also, of course, the difference in importance because everybody recognised that Mugabe was the chief mover and that Nkomo had caught up with him in a remarkable way in organising the forces of ZIPRA. But long before that, he had been friendly with Roy Welensky and he used to meet in his office every so (00:53:31) often then, and it was a lot different. He was much – well we knew him much better but Mugabe, we had no idea what he was like, except that he was a Maoist and probably what we would call an extremist.

His days in prison, although turned to good account as the ultimate badge of authenticity, and especially Smith's refusal to allow him to attend the funeral in Ghana of his young son, for fear that he would abscond, really upset and embittered him. Yet he never restricted Smith's movements as far as I know, on his rise to the premiership of Zimbabwe.

Were you advising the Governor in any way? Were there messages of appeal, of request that in fact Mugabe's party should be prescribed? It shouldn't be allowed to participate in the election because of the intimidation?

I think that was probably true to a certain extent with the Rhodesian delegation there. This is the sort of thing which really, if you could talk to George Smith, he was in it, plus all the Fearless and Tiger, he used to liaise with us. He was the constitutional expert and a lawyer of course, he became a Judge under Mugabe incidentally and he would have had all the knowledge of the ins and outs. One of the delegation I think committed suicide.

Yes, he did. He'd hoped that he would be made Solicitor General and then I think...that's one of the explanations I've been told and then he realised that this was not going to be.

I think that could have been one of them but then he would have been unstable because you don't kill yourself because you can't get a number one post.

There are other reasons, I am sure. That was just a...

He must have been under great stress, maybe even a bust-up at home, who knows?

I'm sure the tale about his thwarted professional hopes was just for public consumption.

Oh, it was just a smokescreen, I'm pretty sure, yes.

What about the land question? What did you think of the land settlement of Lancaster House, immediately around that time?

Yes, I thought that it would have been, should have been worked out fairly and it would have been. But unfortunately in practice, there's a lot of difference between what they agreed on, on paper and what the actual difficulties of working it were.

But what was the understanding of the settlement at Lancaster House on land, back in Rhodesia?

That the white farmers would have a fair deal on possibly either selling or giving up or perhaps eventually acting, as some of them did afterwards, as managers on the land owned by a black person. I think they had great hopes; they just wanted the war to end and they felt that anything they had to face afterwards, they could cope with.

A further comment on Lancaster: Mugabe was the clear winner, and Nkomo's star was in the decline, although he was given a token post of deputy PM. The scheme for the gradual giving up of white owned land would have worked, because the commercial infrastructure was in place, the expertise was available, and some farms would not have changed hands because they were too small, or hardly visible because of poor agricultural condition. My nephew's farm outside Harare was taken over, but then the French Ambassador intervened, thus making it a political issue, and the farm was quickly handed back, and the usurpers, who were mostly drunk, were driven off.

Pressure came from the war veterans, for a better deal, regardless of whether they knew about farming or not. Mugabe awarded them 2000 dollars a month, without consulting the Treasury, and this nearly bankrupted the fiscus. Even so, had the new tenants learnt current farming methods, the economy would have recovered. Many of them, and others who professed to be soldiers, but were too young to have taken part in the fighting, just let the land revert to bush, and reverted themselves to growing a bit of maize for their own families. The former farm workers were sent back to their villages, and were in great poverty.

Re. ZANU Party being proscribed, I seem to remember that the attempt was made, and perhaps some of the advisers on Carrington's team were in favour, but whatever the truth of it, and there were enough rumours flying about in Salisbury, it did not come to anything.

(00:56:32) **How much do you remember in fact, the sense amongst a certain black political section that after a particular period, the constitution could be amended and that a compulsory land purchase scheme would be instituted, funded by the British government.**

Yes, I didn't feel very happy about that because...

No, no, I'm not asking whether you...I'm just asking were you aware of such an understanding? Whether it was accurate or not, was that part of a political discourse?

Yes I think it was, it was known to everybody, I'm sure I was aware.

Even though, in fact, it didn't bear necessarily any connection with reality?

Well yes indeed, yes it's true, yes I'm afraid so. There's so many missed opportunities there because probably both sides weren't really prepared to be frank with one another, and I think they had hidden agendas. I'm sure that Mugabe always intended to take over without having to pay for it because he said "well, the whites have stolen our land, we're going to get it back. We don't see why any compensation should be made". But of course, if the British Government were prepared to, so that would have been one way, yes.

When did you come back to the UK, to England?

I came back on about the 20th December 2000

So you'd spent a considerable amount of time in Zimbabwe, as a Zimbabwean?

Oh yes I did, I counted myself as a Zimbabwean. I had a Zimbabwean passport, of course. I felt I should have this. - I was working in government - that I should have one and when they declared that no other passports should be made available, I just handed mine over to the British High Commission to keep because they did that, as a service because then, they didn't recognise the legality of it.

So they just gave it straight back?

Yes, so it doesn't belong to me anyway because all passports belong to the governments that give them.

Indeed. So you had never had any thought at independence, at Zimbabwean independence of leaving? This was your country, this was your home?

No, I did, I wanted to stay in Zimbabwe but it was not to be.

(00:59:14) **So why did you choose to leave then?**

Well at one time, I had a bit of leave and Lise and I came over, partly to see my brother who died later on, of cancer and to see to the marriage of my niece and nephew and partly because they put us up in their home and things began to look rather more comfortable there. I suppose when I went back, I had it partly in mind but as it happened, things didn't work out in our community quite as well as we'd hoped and we had to leave.

Why didn't they work out?

Well, there were difficulties between the black side of the people and the white and we were accused of being racist and the person down in South Africa who was the spiritual director, a Reverend Ronnie somebody or other, said, well, he got a message from one of the ladies who was the black person, presumably. He wrote to us saying that this is what he found and that we were no longer to stay there and if we wanted to come back there, we would be put out by the people, physically and we were very upset about that. Nevertheless, that was one of the things that happened and it's only the case that when people get together, especially lay people, in a living community, as the early Christians did. There were plenty of upsets because we were all adults. We all had, in fact, settled personalities and our own way of doing things. We couldn't agree with the particular person concerned who was a shopaholic and flouted the law a lot because she sent young people into the local Mtoko centre in the car when they weren't licensed. The local police chief had come across to say especially that we should be very careful about that sort of thing, she just ignored it. So we're very law abiding people and we couldn't get on with that side of it, so we criticised her very heavily. Lise wrote a very strong letter to her about misdemeanours and she sent this straight down to South Africa.

And accused you of being racist

And that's what caused the thing. So we left under a cloud but since then, we've got some mended fences and we love everybody and they love us and that's alright. We could go back there, they would be quite happy now, we got leave to go back and die there and I wanted to have my ashes scattered on the Mutemwa Mountain. But it wasn't to be and in the end, I feel that, as you've seen from the tenure of that report that we feel we've been guided all along, that it was an absolute blessing that we came here because Lise developed dementia four years ago and got more and more disorientated. We needed the support, we couldn't possibly have got anything like the medical attention, let alone the spiritual help.

We also felt that it was necessary to hand over the running of the Community to the African members, although had circumstances been different, we would have been happy to remain in an advisory capacity when called for. What we could not have foreseen was the sudden change in Lise's health, which ended in her requiring round the clock care in the nursing home.

How did you find coming back to England, the experience of it?

Very, very peculiar.

In what way?

(01:03:09) There was too much of everything. We were so used to living very, very simple lives with simple people who just lived from day to day. People seemed to be full of grouses and grumbles. One of the reasons why I had emigrated was I got fed up with hearing people grumbling when I left the Air Force. Well, that was just an offshoot because I really...my heart was really in Africa. But these were the sort of things I came across and the cars, they seemed to be going too fast and I was quite frightened by the speed they were going at.

How about the culture?

The culture was, it seemed to be too regimented and it didn't seem to be very spiritual experiences amongst most of the people. Of course, as soon as we found the Catholic Church, we began to feel more at home.

Yes

But it might have been the same if we'd been Methodist or Baptist or anything like that.

But how had the country changed since you left?

Well, I didn't know Bournemouth really very well at all, before I joined the RAF volunteer reserve, I'd been in London.

Ok, so then now you're living in a south coast town, well, city almost.

Yes and I was very happy with that, I thought Bournemouth was a very attractive place and the fact that there was a university there added interest because you've got the influx of a lot of young people. Otherwise, Bournemouth might be a graveyard of a lot of old people and so that made things much more interesting. Whenever I saw a black person I used to greet her to ask whether she was from Zimbabwe and of course...And that's the other thing, I used to say "good morning" to people I passed and they'd either look as if I was going to mug them or they wouldn't make eye contact and I couldn't get on with that at all. Then I realised that that's not in the English culture.

Well, amongst some people it is!

Some of them did though, they felt perhaps that I looked harmless enough but a lot of them didn't so I found that they're not so outgoing. By this time, I'd got this African habit of being very open and outgoing with people and I found that the British were still reticent and reserved. Fine when you got to know them and they got to know you a little bit but until then, they put up the fence and masked what their feeling were.

Oh we still do that, very much.

Yes I'm sure

(01:06:11) **But looking back, do you think the struggle was worth it?**

The struggle in?

In Rhodesia, for what you tried to do. Would you say it was worth it?

No I don't think so, I don't think so. If you're talking about the establishment of the AIDS orphanage, that's a different matter, entirely separate. By that time I had left government but looking at it and weighing it up, I feel that such a tragedy could have been averted. I feel sure, well most wars for that matter but it was such a sad thing that the Rhodesian whites and Smith anyway, were too frightened to go the half mile with their black brothers and it simply such a waste of resources. All the things that could have been in Southern Rhodesia and perhaps under Welensky being boss of the whole of Federation, even when it broke up, if he'd been returned to the Southern Rhodesian government as Prime Minister, perhaps. Because he wasn't a racist in any way, it might have worked out differently.

Well, I've heard it said that Ian Smith wasn't a racist either.

I don't think he was actually because, don't forget, he'd been born in this little village or town of Selukwe, now it's Shurugwi. His father had been farming there, he had, like most of the whites, he'd been brought up with black children. He spoke their language, he went to schools and there were some blacks amongst them and he couldn't have been racist from that point of view but what he was, was very definite that the blacks had to be nursed along very, very much slower.

So very paternalistic?

Yes, yes I would say so, yes he was. He got on well with people like Nkomo and also with Muzorewa but obviously he didn't think much of his political acumen, no.

Are you in touch with many former Rhodesians and Zimbabweans who are now back in this country?

I'm in touch with one or two. One of them is an ex-BSAP officer called Ian MacPherson who is also the agent for the Rhodesian wildlife magazine because I'm a life member of it and I wasn't getting any magazines. He's sending me copies and he also put me in touch with you and then I've got my friend in Lincolnshire who is an ex-foreign service person, he was senior to myself. He was also incidentally junior secretary to Welensky and he got married and he told me at his wedding that I'd be married within a year and I was.

But you're not on the internet so you don't stay in touch with Rhodesians Worldwide or any of the...?

(01:09:51) Well I get the...of course I get Rhodesians Worldwide and I contribute quite often to the magazine as well.

Because you're very scattered now, as a community across the world. It's almost as if you're a diaspora?

Yes that is true. I'd also been in contact with an Australian federal MP called Dick Cleaver who founded the Swan Cottages for the Aged. He'd originally come to Rhodesia then and as I was foreign affairs, I was delegated to take him round the place and we'd written for about thirty years until he died very recently.

Well, good to stay in touch with people.

And his widow now is 93 and I'm still in touch with her.

Derek, thank you very much indeed for talking to me.

End of interview